
UNIT 2 PEER INFLUENCE

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define peer, peer influence and peer pressure;
- explain the positive and negative impact of peer influence;
- discuss the importance of peer leaders; and
- discuss peer pressure and its management.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Adolescents like and are surrounded by the people like them who form an important part in the development of their personality. These friends of same age group and culture (called peers) help them to pass through the turmoil of the transition period of adolescence. The direction of their influence can make or mar the progress of an adolescent in life. Thus, it is of utmost importance to learn about peers and their influence.

In the previous unit you learnt about the various types of adjustments and conduct important for an adolescent to develop into a healthy individual. However, this is only possible if the teenagers passing through the adolescence phase has the influence of peer which are more positive.

This unit deals with peer, their influence, ability and the need to cope with peer pressure and peer leaders, and the role of teachers in making the adolescence to understand peer pressure and the ways to deal with it. You will find various learning activities and self-assessment tools throughout the unit to check your progress and enable you to prepare your assignments.

2.2 DEFINITION AND MEANING OF PEER, PEER INFLUENCE AND PEER PRESSURE

You must have heard the words peer, peer pressure, peer influence etc. quite often and wondered what they mean. Let us understand what these words mean.

Peer: Refers to a person who belongs to the same social group based on age, sex, occupation or socio-economic background. A group of peers form a peer group. For example, Youth clubs, Teen clubs, Balika Mandals, Self-help groups etc.

In other words peer is the one who is of equal standing. In day to day term a teenager's friends are referred to as his peers. Adolescents are with their peers most of the time.

Peer Influence: When peers force or pressurize you into doing things. For example, use of drugs, you know it is wrong but your friends force you into it.

Peer Pressure: When someone close to your age is trying to make you do something you don't want to do and that you know is wrong thing to do. Peer pressure is usually created by a group of peers.

Teenage years are the years of self discovery. As teens are learning who they are and finding their places in the world, they feel the need to fit each other. Worrying about others leaving them out and not wanting around makes them vulnerable to peer influence and pressure.



Fig. 3.1: Peer Pressure

2.3 PEER INFLUENCE

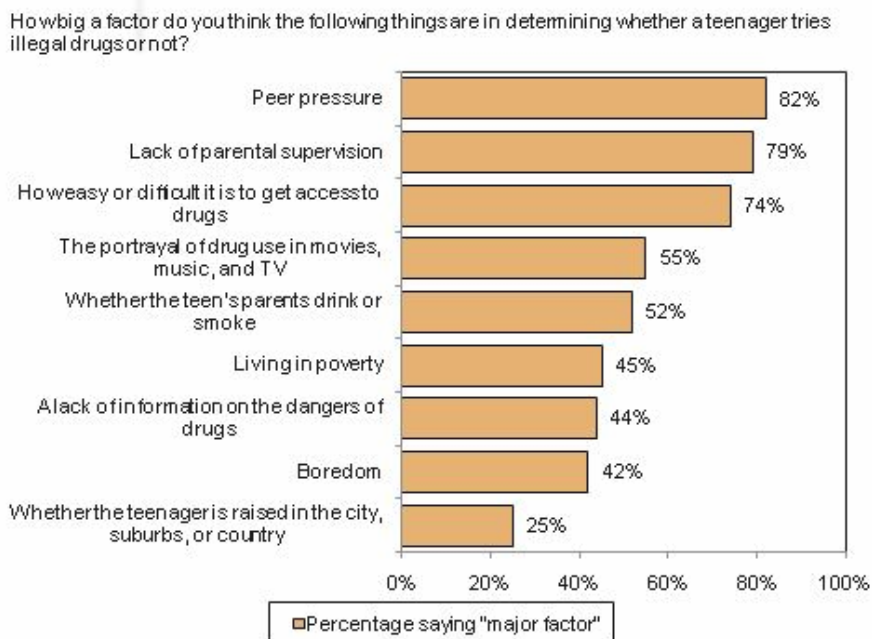
A peer is an individual with whom an individual shares a common interest. It can be said to be the same thing for people when we find two individuals sharing maximum common interest. They tend to influence each other, this is called peer influence. The more characteristics are common, the stronger is the influence. Peers are considered to be best of friends because they share a lot of common characteristics such as:

- Age
- Gender
- Language
- Religion
- Hobby
- Residential area
- Professionalism
- Socio-economic status

Peers give teens companionship, emotional support and a sense of belonging. Peer groups allow teens to question values, discuss problems, share information and practice social skills. They learn that they aren't alone in feeling scared and insecure and others have problems too.

Peer influences can also be very negative. Unhealthy, destructive peer groups can cause much pain and suffering for both parents and teenagers. Teens whose friends are involved in risky behaviours, illegal activities or experimenting with drugs, may easily be persuaded to join in. Parents may dislike their teenagers' friends and possibly for good reasons, but it is impossible to force teens to choose healthy friends. Most often, when teens are forced to choose between their parents or their peer group, they choose their friends.

Statistics show a high prevalence of peer pressure among adolescents of 21st century:



Source: PewResearch Center 2/01

Activity 1

Who are two of your peers who influence you the most. Why?

2.3.1 Types of Peer Influence

Peer Influence can be positive or negative. Let us understand these influences.

I) Negative Peer Influence

Peers influence each other in negative manner due to the desire or requirement of conformity. One could be excluded from the group if s/he is not accommodating to the situation or incapable of affirming to the group norms. Accordingly s/he adopts of similar behaviour like dressing, bunking the class or smoking etc.

II) Positive peer influence

The peer may influence the other peer:

a) As role models

Here the peer has the ease for

- i. Sharing of information
 - ii. Finding solution for similar problems
 - iii. Sharing secrets and confiding.
- b) As a reference for**
- i. Confidential relationships
 - ii. Models of identification
 - iii. Feeling of being understood and accepted.
 - iv. Forming a personal identity.

Pressure from peers may be due to:

- i. Confirming to norms of the peer group
- ii. Black mailing
- iii. Fear of dislocation

An adolescent is easily influenced because s/he is facing difficulties or problems either in his-

Family or social environment. These can be:

- Parental conflict
- Abuse
- Alcoholism
- Lack of maturity of parents (teen parents)
- Lack of communication
- Lack of understanding

- Lack of affection
- Negligence/ indifference by parents
- Rejections /abandonment by parents/family
- Excessive / no control by parents
- Difficult circumstances viz. street children, juvenile home.

Activity 2

Recollect two of your past experiences where your peer/peers influenced you positively and negatively.

2.3.2 Managing Peer Influence

An adolescent can be helped in resisting peer influence by –

- Listening to him actively
- Being nonjudgmental
- Giving correct and scientific information
- Valuing the capacity of adolescence
- Being a role model
- Inculcating acceptance and self respect.

The parents have to learn to work with peer influence, not against it. They have to encourage them to involve in organized activity groups, such as school events, sports and clubs. Time should be spent with teens, doing something you both enjoy. Their friends should be invited to home and opportunities need to be searched to learn about them. Limits need to be set that eliminate the opportunity for negative activities. For example, do not allow unsupervised activities for long periods of time, or late at night.

The adolescent can be encouraged to adopt a style of behaviour through which he/she is easily able to manage peer influence.

The following techniques may be used to say “no”

A. “No thanks” technique: “Would you like an Ice Cream?”

“No Thanks”

B. Give a reason or excuse: “Do you want to see the film?”

“No thanks, I have to practice basketball”.

C. Broken record technique: “Just try this joint”

“No way”

“Come on, just once!”

“No way”

“Come on”

“No way”

“Don’t worry. You won’t get caught, wimp”

“I said, No Way!”

D. Walk away: “Are you coming outside for a chat?”

Say “no” and walk away while saying it

E. Avoid the situation: If you know or see places where people often cause trouble, stay away from those places or go another way.

F. Cold shouldering: “Hey, are you coming to the party on Saturday night? There will be lots of beer and fun!”

Just ignore the person.

G. Change the subject: Start talking about something else

“Do you want some beer?”

“Hey! I’m not into this music at all. I’m going to go request something else.”

H. Strength in numbers: Hang around with people you trust, especially in problem situations.

I. Humor: Make a joke of the situation.

“Want a beer?”

“No thanks, too much work with my button fly”

J. State a health problem: “Do you want to go for a motorcycle ride?”

“No thanks, I’m having a headache.”

K. Reverse the pressure: “I saw that CD in his room. We should get it.”

“Didn’t I tell you, I don’t want it?”

Activity 3

Have a role play enacting a situation wherein few of your peers try to persuade a peer to smoke and he tries to come out of the situation by saying no?

Check Your Progress 1

a) What does the term peer influence mean to you?

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b) What are the types of peer influences and how do they help us?

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c) Explain how can you manage peer influence in a positive manner.
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2.4 PEER PRESSURE

Let us now read about peer pressure, its meaning, types and ways to handle peer pressure.

2.4.1 Meaning of Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is a pressure by peer group to take certain actions, adopt certain values or otherwise confirm in order to be accepted.

It can also be understood in a manner that it is a pressure from one peer to behave in a manner similar or acceptable to other peers. Peer pressure is a normal part of life and children need guidance from their teachers, parent and others adults so that they can handle the pressure in a positive manner.

2.4.2 Types of Peer Pressure

Peer pressure can have positive as well as negative effects on adolescents and often puts them at a risk. It is responsible for low self-esteem, lack of confidence, feeling isolated, depression, poor academic, performance etc. Let us understand peer pressure.

Peer pressure can be classified into two major types:

a) Positive Peer Pressure

Positive peer pressure is usually overloaded by adults and is described as an influence to do what is perceived by them as right. A child under the influence of positive peer pressure may take up to study more seriously, join a sports team, volunteer for same game work etc.

b) Negative Peer Pressure

Negative peer pressure is usually dangerous and is often against school rules, home rules and code of conduct which we need to follow. Under the influence of negative peer pressures, adolescents may start smoking, taking drugs, having unsafe sex, bullying, sneaking out of house, skipping school and disrespect authority etc.

2.4.3 Handling Peer Pressure

It is very important to understand for the adolescent to learn to manage the peer pressure in an effective manner. S/he needs to be taught the positive and healthy ways to deal with peer pressure. For example, if the adolescent is comforted with peer pressure, s/he can:

- make a joke and change the subject
- say “No” and keep saying “No”
- leave the area
- suggest a different activity

Adolescent can learn certain basic steps when confronted with peer pressure:

Ask questions such as:

- A) Why should I do that?
- B) Whose idea is it?
- C) Is this a good thing to do?

The last question can be answered if the act is going to cause harm to self or others or is it against the rules, norms or policies etc. Accordingly, s/he has to evaluate the consequences and manage the situation as discussed in section 2.3.2.

Adolescents can adopt certain strategies to deal with peer pressure.

- A) Nurture one’s ability and self esteem.
- B) Encourage peer interaction with cultural diversities differences.

Peer pressure if dealt with a positive attitude, it can not only prove helpful for the child, but also help the child to deal with it in an amiable manner. Parents can help the adolescent deal with peer pressures by following ways:

1. **Strengthen the bond with your child :** He will be more likely to respect your views and values and better able to resist peer pressure if he has a good relationship with you and feels you are a source of support. This bond needs to be nurtured long before your child’s teenage years.
2. **Promote your child’s self-esteem :** Children who are confident and have positive self-worth are more likely to pursue friendships with children who are good role models and better able to resist negative peer pressure. Find opportunities to boost your child’s self-esteem and enjoy success by involving him in activities that capitalize on his strengths and interests. And, of course, praise him for things he does well at home.
3. **Set a good example :** Your child is a keen observer of what you do and may learn more from what he sees than what he hears. If he sees that you are constantly striving to keep up with other parents, he will likely do the same with his peers. If he sees you drinking and smoking, he is less likely to resist engaging in these behaviours. If you do drink or smoke, giving it up will make a vivid impression on him.
4. **Talk with your child about peer pressure :** Let your child know that you understand how hard it can be at his age to do things that make him stand out. Tell him that his peers may respect his decision not to join them in an activity even though they may not express it and that some may even admire his courage in resisting what they could not. Help him understand that a friend who is pressuring him to do something that may be harmful is not much

of a friend. Appeal to his desire for autonomy by encouraging him not to let others manipulate or make decisions for him.

5. **Avoid overreacting when talking about peer issues :** Your child may tell you things that may make your jaw drop. If you overreact, you will discourage him from talking with you about these issues again. At the same time use these teachable moments to introduce some cautions without moralizing or lecturing. Although it may seem as though he is dismissing what you are saying, he will hear you.
6. **Choose your battles carefully :** Don't make an issue out of your child's wanting to wear the same clothes as his friends or adopt a trendy hairstyle. Make your stand on high-risk peer behaviour. Battling your child constantly over minor issues may drive your child toward peers who are similarly alienated from their parents. Not sweating the small stuff will enable you to be more effective when you challenge him on the larger issues.
7. **Help your child develop good decision-making skills :** If he can learn to trust his own instincts when making decisions, he will be less likely to let others make decisions for him. Encourage him to think through the possible consequences of the decision he is facing, including whether it may cause him harm. Let him know that giving in to the pressure now may make life harder for him later on.
8. **Help your child develop responses to peers :** Help him figure out what to say to peers who are pressuring him to participate in high-risk activities. Suggest responses that are short and simple and that he can say comfortably. If he is receptive, role-play with him or encourage him to practice in front of a mirror.
9. **Get to know your child's friends :** Make a point of encouraging your child to invite his friend's home. Spend some time with them and assess whether they are positive influences.
10. **Don't hesitate to set limits for your child :** Your willingness to say no to him sets a good example and may help give him the courage to say no to a peer when faced with a potentially harmful situation.

Activity 4

Recollect an experience when you were under peer pressure. Share it with your peers.

Check Your Progress 2

a) Define peer pressure.

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b) What are the two main types of peer pressure?

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 c. Describe ways to manage peer pressure.

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 d. What strategies can children evolve to deal with peer pressure?

2.5 PEER LEADERS

You must have come across some of your peers who have more influence on others and/or are decision makers in a peer group. These are peer leaders. Let us learn about them.

2.5.1 Defining Peer Leaders

A peer leader is a person who has the potential to create an environment where the peers can maximize their abilities to create change by taking action. A peer leader can have a miserable impact on the school climate or a peer relationship.

2.5.2 Qualities of a Good Peer Leader

Leadership is basically an art and to a good leader one has to work on imposing oneself first.

There are certain qualities required for a peer leader. They are:

- Character
- Charisma
- Commitment
- Communication
- Competence
- Courage
- Discernment
- Focus
- Generosity
- Initiative
- Listening

- Passion
- Positive attitude
- Problem solving
- Security
- Teaching ability

There is an important saying by Warren bennig and Peter Druker.

“Management is doing things right, Leadership is doing the right thing”

A leader can be nominated; self selected or recruited, keeping in mind certain qualities. A good leader needs to have an ability to influence others. He should be able to encourage others and show empathy towards the others. S/he should be willing to take risk and should have a sense of purpose or direction to achieve the goals.

2.5.3 Role of Peer Leaders

Peer leaders help to enable their peers to experience their powers to effect change by exercising leadership in their environment through formal and informal interventions.

Adolescents are not just kids-they are the future. They are the people with ideas and minds of their own who can accomplish great things if given a chance. That chance is what the adolescents need to be provided through opportunities of real life applications. Peer leaders help in providing with the opportunity to develop awareness and understanding of community issues, problems and resources.

Peer leaders help to increase the self esteem of the young people and promote critical thinking and problems solving. An environment is created by them where the peers feel safe to learn and discuss important issues. They also help in developing social responsibility with opportunities to provide community service and model pro-social behaviour. Peer leaders play an important role in providing their peers with opportunity to develop awareness and understanding of community issues, problems and resources.

Activity 5

Identify some peer leaders in your group. What are various qualities they possess?

Check Your Progress 3

a) Define peer leader.

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b) Enlist down the various qualities of a good peer leader.

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- c) Explain the role of peer leaders in the success of a programme in the life of the adolescents.
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2.6 PEER EDUCATION – AN EMERGING PARADIGM

The use of same age or same background educators to convey educational messages to a target group. Peer educators work by endorsing “healthy” norms, beliefs and behaviours within their own peer group or “community” and challenging those which are “unhealthy”.

(United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, 2000)

Defining Peer Educator

The term “**peer educator**” refers to an especially trained person who is the member of a particular peer group, is generally respected within the group and is more likely to be influential. Peer educators may act in different roles, such as facilitators, counsellors, sources of information, support workers or tutors.

Peer Education: A Strategy for Adolescent Empowerment

- Teenagers are more likely to hear and personalize messages and thus to change their attitudes and behaviours, if they believe the messenger is similar to them and faces the same concerns and pressures.
- Workshops and training programmers have demonstrated that peer educators influence health behaviours – not only in regard to addressing sexuality but also in regard to communication difficulties, aggression and substance use and stress management.
- Peer education works on the premise that teenagers have with their peers, leverages the power of role modelling and provide flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of today’s adolescent.
- Trained peer educators are a more credible source of information for some youth than are adult educators because they communicate in readily understandable ways and serve as positive role models while dispelling misperceptions that most youth are problematic. Peer education programmes are especially beneficial to adolescents because of:
 - Special training in making decisions, clarifying values and acting in accordance with those values.

- Correct and scientific information relevant to their own lives.
- Recognition as leaders by their peers and community.
- Direct involvement, a voice and some control in programs' design and operation.
- Learning of important skills, including facilitation and communication.
- Commitment to responsible and age appropriate behaviours.
- Active and meaningful involvement to youth also provide young people with opportunities to increase their self-discipline and self-esteem and to gain positive stature in the community, broader career choices and a better understanding of diversity. Peer educators who entered the program in their early teen years and who remained with the program for one to two years were less sexually active and/or more likely to have protected sex than were comparison youth in the community. Peer educators often achieve greater sexual health knowledge, hold more positive attitudes and report fewer risk behaviours.

Check Your Progress 4

a. Peer education programmes are especially beneficial to adolescents. Discuss.

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2.7 ROLE OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS

As adolescents spend 6-7 hour in school or we can say with peers, you as a teacher can help adolescents to deal with peer influenced by following ways:

- Be a role model for positive behaviour
- Utilize peer pressure to keep unruly kids in line
- Nurture abilities and self-esteem in adolescents by emphasizing on self-concept and self worth.

Parents may follow following actions to help the adolescent in dealing with peer influences:

- Take interested in your adolescents and their peers
- Help the adolescents to seek amicable solutions to their problems
- Set boundaries and rules to be strictly followed at home and outside e.g., time for returning home, no to sex/ alcohol etc
- Take a proactive approach to potentially serious problems and involve teenagers
- Help teenagers evaluate each friendship

2.7 LET US SUM UP

It is important to know that peer today, form an important position in the life of an adolescent and it is this influence which greatly affects the development of the child to a major extent. In this unit you have developed an understanding of peer, peer influence and the pressure created by peers. You have also understood that peers can have a positive and negative influence and it is up to the adolescent how he is able to manage it.

Peer leaders play a major role in the growing up of the teenager and provide with a lot of inspiration to the individual. Peers create their own pressure and how an adolescent is able to deal with it, handling pressure in a beautiful manner is what he has to learn in the process of growing up as a strong individual. Teachers and parents have a role to play to deal with peer influence and to move in the right direction to become a good human being in life. Peer educators, act in different roles, such as facilitators, counsellors, sources of information, support workers or tutors thus, providing an enriching environment and leading to a healthy development of an adolescent.

2.8 KEY WORDS

Commitment	:	Dedication
Charisma	:	Charm
Case Study	:	an occurrence of a situation
Discernment	:	Judgment
Management	:	to deal with
Behaviour	:	conduct
Influence	:	effect of one person or thing on another
Nurture	:	bringing up of a child
Esteem	:	think highly of
Imposing	:	impressive

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- a) Peer influence is basically a pressure either feels inside or from others to do something you are not comfortable with, even when nobody says anything.
- b) **Types of peer influence:**
- Peer influence usually is of two types :
- i) Positive peer influence.
 - ii) Negative peer influence.

Positive peer influence – the peer may influence under two main difficulties :

Peer as educational modals

- Sharing of information
- Similar problems
- Facility to confide to the peer
- Age mate relationship

Peer as a reference

- Confidential relationship
 - Modals of identification
 - Feeling of being understood and accepted
 - Forming a personal identity
 - Pressure is from peers
 - Desire of Imposing
 - Black mailing
 - Fear of dislocation
- c) Show them your ability to listen to them actively.
- Avoid judging them.
 - Give them good information.
 - Help them good information help them in evaluating their situation.
 - Put to value the capacity of adol.
 - Be on self as a role model.
 - Teaching acceptance and self-respect.

Check Your Progress 2

- a) Peer pressure is a pressure by peer group to take certain actions, adopt certain values or otherwise conform in order to be accepted. It can also be understood in a manner that it is a pressure from one peer to behave in a manner similar or acceptable to them. Peer pressure is a normal part of life and children need guidance from their teachers, parent and other adults so that they can handle the pressure in a positive manner.
- b) Peer pressure can be classified into two major types:
- i) Positive Peer Pressure
 - ii) Negative Peer Pressure

Positive peer factor is usually overloaded by adults and is described as an influence to do what is right. A child under the influence of positive peer pressure may take up to study more seriously, join a sports team, volunteer for some game work etc.

Negative peer pressure is usually dangerous and often against school rules, home rules and code of conduct which we need to follow. Under the influence of negative peer pressures the child may start smoking, bullying, sneaking out of house, skipping school and disrespect authority etc.

c) **S/he can**

- make a joke and change the subject
- say “No” and keep saying “No”
- leave the area
- suggest a different activity
- the child can hang out with those who share his belief.

d) Adolescent can learn to follow certain basic steps when confronted with peer pressure

Ask questions like –

- Why would we do that?
- Whose idea was it?
- Is this a good thing to do?
- Identify negative behaviour against policies etc.
- Evaluate the consequences like we can get into trouble like my parents
- Can take my allowance etc.
- Suggest alternatives like why we don't go after school is over
- Leave situation: remove from situation, walk away and do something else
- Children can adopt certain strategies to deal with peer pressure
- Nurture teenager's ability and self esteem
- Empower parents to help teens
- Encourage peer interaction and guide teenagers to in dealing in a positive
- Manner with cultural diversities and individual differences.

Check Your Progress 3

- a) Peer leader is a person who has a potential to create an environment where peers can maximize their abilities to create change by taking action.
- b) Qualities of a good peer leader are :
- Character
 - Charisma
 - Commitment
 - Communication

- Competence
 - Courage
 - Discernment
 - Focus
 - Generosity
 - Initiative
 - Listening
 - Passion
 - Positive attitude
 - Problem solving
 - Security
 - Teach ability.
- c) Peer leaders help to increase young people self-esteem as well as critical thinking. Peer leaders help in providing student with opportunity to develop awareness and understanding of community issues and problems.

Check Your Progress 4

- a) Peer education programmes are especially beneficial to adolescents because of :
- Special training of peer educators helps them in making decisions, clarifying values and acting in accordance with those values.
 - Correct and scientific information relevant to their own lives.
 - Recognition as leaders by their peers and community.
 - Direct involvement, a voice and some control in programs' design and operation.
 - Learning of important skills, including facilitation and communication.
 - Commitment to responsible and age appropriate behaviours.
 - Active and meaningful involvement to youth also provide young people with opportunities to increase their self-discipline and self-esteem and to gain positive stature in the community, broader career choices and a better understanding of diversity.

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